WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 SEPTEMBER 1996

# WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

KAREN'S COLUMN

## MoMS SERENE ON OUTSIDE THIS SUMMER BUT LOTS OF PLUMBING ACTIVITY ON THE INSIDE

This summer we welcomed, with extreme gratitude, the arrival of the plumbers provided by Al Walk Plumbing, Inc. They have done a first-class job.

We now have two exterior hose connections, a sink with running water in the basement, a water heater and back-up sump pump. The piping is complete in the walls and ceilings. Installation of fixtures in the first floor bathroom and upstairs coffee bar will take place after the cabinets are built.

**A beautiful sight! The plumber's truck parked at the Museum on Main Street!**

On June 17, the Ann Arbor City Council passed a resolution that enabled us to have the water meter installed without being assessed the usual $710 fee.

We are proving to be the exception to the rule, "You get what you pay for." All the plumbing has been done as a volunteer donation to the Historical Society. We are very lucky and VERY grateful to Al Walk for this work.

Ella Grenier has kept the gardens looking beautiful all summer. The Museum looked serene and peaceful on the outside while inside there was a good deal of activity and demolition taking place in order to get the plumbing in place.

Versile Fraleigh donated and planted three pyracantha bushes near the driveway. Also called Firethorn, these shrubs will discourage pedestrians seeking a shorter route through that garden area!

Karen O'Neal, 665-2242

## STEINWAY ART-CASE PIANOS SEPTEMBER TOPIC

"The History of the Steinway Art-Case Pianos" will be told at the first fall WCHS meeting Sunday, September 22, at the Martha Cook Building which has one of those pianos.

Bob Grijalva of the University of Michigan School of Music will talk about the emergence of the art-case piano in the world of piano manufacturing as an expression of visual art. He will take particular note of the Martha Cook Steinway and another in the U-M Art Museum.

The program will be at 2 p.m. in the Gold Room of Martha Cook, 906 South University. Please note this is the fourth Sunday of September.

## "TEA AND TRAINS" FUND RAISER AT GANDY DANCER PLANNED NOVEMBER 9

Please mark your calendar for a special "Tea and Trains" fund raiser at the Gandy Dancer Saturday, November 9 from 2-5 p.m.

It will feature fancy foods by the Gandy Dancer chefs and a program on "Railroad Stations of Michigan" by two of the premiere local railroad fans, Dr. Mark Hildebrandt and Sam Breck.

Tickets at $35 per person will benefit the Museum on Main Street.

## MUSEUM SHOP NEEDS VOLUNTEER DIRECTOR

WCHS needs a volunteer coordinator for the Museum Shop. Olive (Bets) Hansen who developed the shop and has ably run it for several years has resigned to take on a new commitment with the Elderwise program.

The shop has a number of appropriate items for sale from note cards, books, and games to coffee mugs. Until the Museum opens the shop travels to meetings or other events.

## CERTIFICATES OFFERED

Hand-lettered certificates are offered free of charge, framed if desired, by WCHS to organizations, businesses, schools etc., for milestone anniversaries. Information: 663-8826.

## COORDINATOR HIRED TO DEVELOP LOAN BOXES

WCHS has hired a new part-time educational coordinator, Ann Reynolds, to develop loan boxes on history themes for loan to local schools for a fee. The first will probably be called "Life Without Electricity."

Ms. Reynolds has an A.B. in anthropology from the University of Michigan and has worked with the U-M Natural History Museum for several years.

## *WHAT IS IT?* GAME OFFERED SCHOOLS, GROUPS

WCHS offers traveling exhibits of small artifacts, set up as a humorous "What Is It?" game, to schools for children and another for adults. They are available for classes and meetings. Information: Arlene Schmid, 665-8773.

## WCHS HAS 80% OF KNAPP'S POINTS TOWARD GOAL

WCHS has now collected 14,367 Bill Knapp's Restaurant points toward more acid-free materials to safely store textiles thanks to members and friends. That is 80% of our goal of 17,860 points.

Anyone who eats at Knapp's may request a yellow points slip from the cashier each time. One point is given for each dollar spent. Please give or send to Alice Ziegler, 537 River view Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

## TIMELY TOPIC

"Adventures in Collecting Campaign Memorabilia" will be the topic of the October 20 WCHS program. The collectors are Douglas Kelley and Wendell Peterson.

JOHN ALLEN

# PERSONAL MISFORTUNES LED TO FOUNDING OF ANN ARBOR

The Washtenaw County Historical Society celebrated the 200th birthday of Ann Arbor founder John Allen at its annual meeting May 15 and also recognized the birth that same year of 1796 of John Dix, founder of Dixboro where the annual meeting was held.

Both founders were honored on the decorated birthday cake served following a talk by Professor Russell Bidlack, the local authority on Ann Arbor's founders.

"In 1796, George Washington was still president. He would make his farewell address September 18, 1796. I think it is re-read every year in Congress on that date. George III was still king of England. He had not gone mad yet.

"Napoleon Bonaparte married Josephine and began the conquest of Europe. Dr. Edward Jenner in England discovered or invented vaccination for small pox which certainly makes a difference in world history.

"Lithography was invented the next year, the ancestor of offset printing. The iron plow was about to be invented and on May 17,1796 a baby was born in Augusta County, Virginia, named John Allen.

"John Allen lived until 1851. He died at age 54 in San Francisco.

"He was of Scotch-Irish ancestry. His family had been staunch Presbyterians for many years. His was the fourth generation of Allens in Augusta County.

"The Allens were rather extensive land owners, not in comparison to Thomas Jefferson or George Washington, of course, but they had the same pride of ownership and family that the most aristocratic families of Virginia did.

"John's father, James Allen, was a colonel of the local militia. He was always called Colonel Allen. He was an elder of the Old Stone Church, the oldest Presbyterian Church in Virginia.

"Certainly, as the oldest son in this family, John could expect to inherit, under the law of primogeniture, the basic land that the family owned, 500 acres going back to 1740.

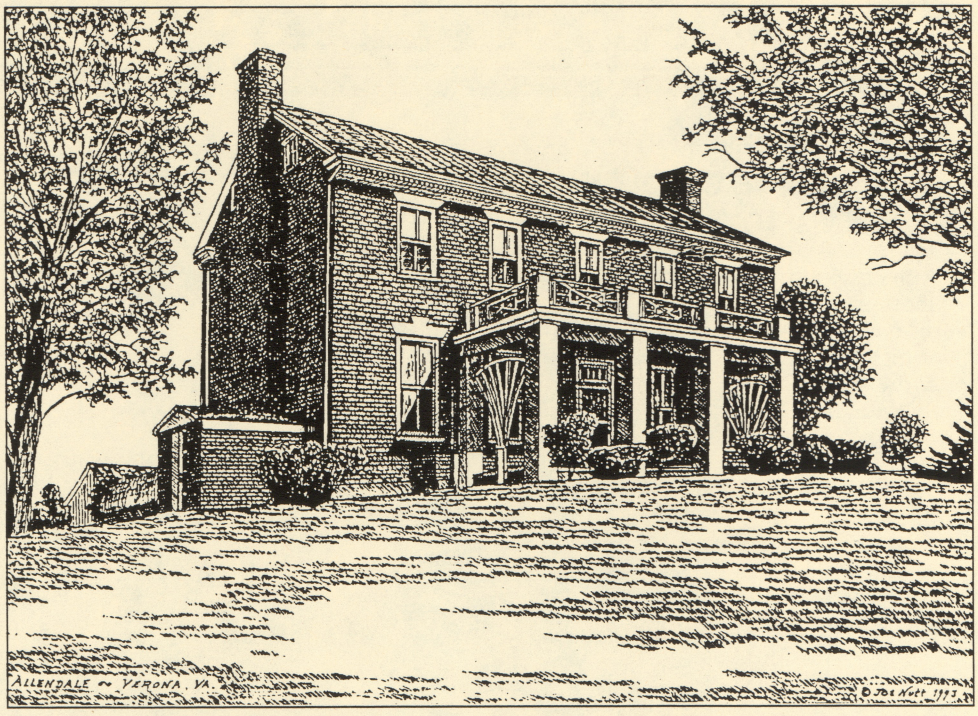
"His father had bought a lot of additional land and in 1810 his father had built a house on the Broad River, the home plantation that is still considered a stately home of Virginia.

"We have only one description of John Allen from 1828 by the Rev. Lorenzo Davis, a man whose name is frequently found in Ann Arbor history.

"John Allen was physically a grand specimen of a man. He was over six feet tall and was well proportioned. He was well-educated, not a classical scholar but a good English scholar and very apt in acquiring the elements of science," the Rev. Davis said.

"I suppose he reached what would have been called the common school education of his day," Professor Bidlack continued.

"Under family tradition it was assumed he would inherit the family land, that he would marry advantageously—that meant marry someone who was also an heir to add to the property—and it was assumed that after that he would lead the quiet life of a Virginia gentleman farmer.




Pictures courtesy of Russell Bidlack

**Recent drawing of boyhood home of Ann Arbor co-founder John Allen near Staunton, Virginia.**

"An inborn restlessness, I believe, and a personal tragedy along with some very unfortunate investments by his father dictated a very different career for John Allen.

"When he was 19, a little young for a man to marry although girls often married at 16, he was married to a distant cousin named Mary Crawford. There was great inbreeding of families in this area of Scotch-Irish. They all seemed to be cousins of one degree or another.

"This was an advantageous marriage because Mary Crawford was the only child of deceased parents and among her assets was title to 1,600 acres of Kentucky land. As you well know, in those days the man immediately became the manager, the owner of any property brought to him by marriage.

"His father was so pleased with the marriage that he gave him a farm he had purchased containing 397 acres for which he paid $10,000. He also gave him $2,000 worth of slaves. Few young men of John Allen's time in the south started with a more promising future.

"Four years after his marriage, in 1819, his wife, Mary Crawford, died at age 21. She left two children, James C. Allen, 4, and Elizabeth, a few months.

"I found Mary's grave in the Old Stone Church cemetery. It was a large slab with a lengthy engraving. I suppose John Allen wrote it. The first two lines read 'Farewell dear partner of my heart, so early called from earth away.'

"Shortly after Mary's death, other crises came to a head, primarily financial ones involving his father. Though a great many records survive and I have copies of a good many from Augusta County, I cannot give you a detailed record of how James Allen became so embarrassed financially.

"From things we hear about him I think he was a most kind, trusting man, but I think rather disorganized and I suspect, did not manage money very well. In any case it was discovered by this time that he was greatly in debt.

"John Allen, along with his younger brother, in an attempt to be of assistance, mortgaged their own land. John mortgaged the farm his father had given him and took on $17,000 in these debts. That was a lot of money then. In the end John became responsible for $40,000 in debt.

"On June 7,1821, John Allen married a second time. He married a youthful widow just slightly younger than himself, named Ann Isabella Barry McCue.

"It's interesting that until her father died when she was three years old her name had always been Agnes. But on his death bed her father requested that she be named after her own mother, Ann Isabella Smith.

"I've often pondered the way our town was named. It would really be interesting if it were named Agnes Arbor.

"I think there were probably no two people married in those days more different from one another than John and Ann. Ann had had a very careful upbringing though her mother died when she was nine days old and her father died before she was three. She was well taken care of by wealthy relatives.

"She was sent to Ireland to her grandmother when she was just under four. The

grandmother came to this country in 1806, bringing Ann with her, to make a home for another son who had lost his wife.

"Because of her well-to-do father, Ann had inherited a good deal of money that was carefully invested for her by a rich cousin in Baltimore and consequently the relatives had plenty of money to dip into to see that she was well-educated. She was remarkably well-educated for a girl of that period including a finishing school in Baltimore from about 1810-12.

"John Allen, of course, was a slave owner. Ann Allen never could see the evil of slavery and was happy to return one day from the wilds of Arm Arbor back to being taken care of by slaves.

"John Allen largely revolted against that institution in the South. We have a delightful letter he wrote to an aunt in Ohio. I hope he was being honest though he was writing to an abolitionist.

"He wrote in 1825, 'Oh, how great a curse are we delivered from, the faults of which at all times constrain me to bless and praise the Disposer of all events for his thus delivering us by a strong hand from the land of oppression and tyranny and placing us in a land of liberty and peace for the sweat, the groans, the blood of the afflicted sons and daughters of Africa shall never rise in judgment to condemn us.'

"In 1823 on May 10 the only child of John Allen and Ann Isabella was born. It was the same year Ann's grandmother died and the child was named Sarah Ann Allen for Ann's grandmother.

"Picture John Allen at the time of Sarah's birth, a young man 28 years old, full of ambition, anxious to make a name in the world, a wife to support who had been accustomed to a rather high standard of living, five children to support if he included her two sons by her first husband for whom her brother-in-law had become guardian and he was encumbered by those overwhelming debts. He felt trapped.

"Among the estate papers and court records is an interesting letter John wrote to his father in the summer of 1823. You might wonder why John was writing to his father—they only lived a few miles apart.

"But miles were long in those days and even notes back and forth substituted for conversations.

"He wrote, 'Consider my circumstances at present with what they were when I undertook to pay the debts. Not that I repent what I have done for I feel constrained having done the best of my abilities, encouraged by the reflection that I have taken from your shoulders a burden I always considered too heavy for you. How does the case stand now, those shoulders having become rested?'

"He meant he was returning the debt to his father.

"There was immediate foreclosure on everything. Old Colonel Allen and his wife, Elizabeth, were told to vacate their luxurious home by October 1,1824.

"Sometime during the late summer or early autumn of 1823, John Allen left Augusta County never to return. The tax collector that year explained his departure with one word—opposite his name he wrote 'absconded.' Many people thought John Allen still had the debts that he had taken over from his father.

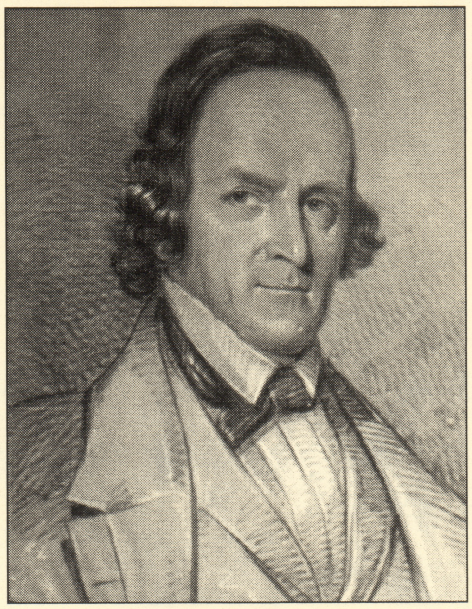


**Photo of portrait of John Allen done in charcoal by an unidentified artist in New York City, probably in 1836, owned by an Allen descendant.**

"There remains some mystery over just what Allen did. A cousin who claimed to remember quite clearly said John Allen bought up a lot of cattle on credit to take to Baltimore to market. Another version is that the farmers trusted their cattle to Allen to take to market.

"It seems amazing that cattle would be taken some 200 miles away. They refer to it as carrying them. In the army of the South when somebody said he carried something it didn't mean literally. It meant he took them.

"I suppose he drove them with, perhaps, someone helping him. Anyway he took these cattle to Baltimore. Everyone, including his own family, expected him to return.

"The cousin said the parents spread the word that they feared he had been assassinated. Others thought that must have happened as well.

"But eventually they heard he had gone to Buffalo, New York, to look into the feasibility of buying government land using the cattle money.

"He explained this to his aunt saying he only took the pence from these cattle in order to someday repay the pounds that he owed back in Virginia. He had the idea of starting to play the dangerous game of land speculation.

"He, of course, left behind his wife and baby daughter. At that point Ann had been taken to the home of her former brother-in-law where she was united with her two sons by her first husband because he had become their guardian.

"In one of his letters to his aunt, John admitted he had left his family to suffer persecution unheard of but that he hoped by doing this and investing the money he would be able to pay the debts.

"I might note here that Allen was very good about saving all his business correspondence. All of that was once borrowed by a man named Burton of the Burton Abstract Company whose hobby was collecting material about Detroit and Northwest history.

"He never returned the material and it is now in the Detroit Public Library's Burton Historical Collection. The letters that Allen received are a gold mine of information. Unfortunately he did not keep copies of his own letters.

"In Buffalo we know that he talked to various people about his plan of buying cheap government land then selling for $1.25 an acre. He had something less than $1,000 from his cattle money.

"We know from two letters he saved from two merchants in Buffalo he was talking about founding a town. One was addressed to Allen at 'Allensville, Detroit, Michigan,' the other to Allen at 'Annapolis, Detroit, Michigan.' Obviously he was toying with those two names.

"The first historian in Ann Arbor, Mary Clark, wrote in 1852 that she had known Ann Allen. She said Ann Allen said he always intended to call it Annapolis, the 'Ann' part honoring her. She wasn't sure how it changed into Ann Arbor except she preferred it.

"Allen was advised that Detroit would be a good place to look for western land and he decided to go there although he had really had the Toledo, Ohio, area in mind.

Allen came to Detroit by way of Canada with a French guide. In talking to people in one of four taverns in Detroit he met a man who was also toying with the idea of buying government land and starting a town.

"His name was Rumsey. He was ten years older than Allen. He had a lot more to be running away from at this point than did Allen.

"He had just left jail in Albany. He had absconded with money he borrowed to buy cattle in Connecticut and he planned to pay back.

"He was found in Michigan in 1823, taken back to Albany, faced his creditors and jailed for a while. He borrowed money from his own father in Vermont and set out again for Detroit. He was coming with a wife to whom he had not been married.

"Rumsey had been left a widower with five children. Mary Ann Rumsey was a very attractive young woman born in 1800, considerably younger man Rumsey. Although some Rumsey people talk about a marriage record, I've never found it.

"There are enough circumstantial remarks I have found to convince me that the problem was that Mary Ann was a 'grass widow.' That can be interpreted various ways, one being a woman who has been abandoned by her husband.

"Anyway, Allen and Rumsey met. They both wanted to find a new home. They both had the idea of starting a town with cheap government land, then selling lots at a great profit. They decided to pool their resources.

"They called on Governor Cass, the appointed governor of Michigan Territory.

Detroit at that time had a population of just over 13,000.

"I am convinced, though I cannot prove it, that Governor Cass told them about a spot he had observed a couple years earlier along the Huron River.

"We know he had taken a trip on the old Sauk Indian trail, now U.S.. Highway 12 more or less, so I suspect that when Elisha Rumsey and John Allen set out the first day of February 1824 they knew where they were headed. They found their spot very soon and, on February 12, they were back in Detroit.

"Allen purchased 480 acres at $1.25 an acre, Rumsey, 160 acres. Allen paid $600, Rumsey, $200. It was all in Section 29 of what became Ann Arbor Township.

"On February 14, probably on the urging of Allen and Rumsey, Governor Cass appointed several commissioners to explore the new county of Washtenaw with a view to establishing a county seat. The county had been mapped but not organized.

"Another man already in Washtenaw County named Woodruff was very hopeful that his spot would someday be chosen as county seat. He was at a small settlement in what is now Ypsilanti.

"The commissioners went back to Detroit and reported they had found the ideal spot, the piece of land Allen and Rumsey had bought. They were always referred to as Allen and Rumsey because Allen was the leader.

"Ann Arbor's becoming the county seat assured Allen and Rumsey's success. It was a very fortunate decision. I've often wondered if something might have passed over the table but I think Governor Cass was an honest man so probably not.

"After buying their land and laying out their town to their liking, Allen and Rumsey were back in Detroit on May 25,1824. On that date I found the first record with the name Annarbour. It was written by a surveyor in Detroit to whom Allen had taken a crude sketch of what he planned.

"Two days later Gov. Cass issued his formal pronouncement making Ann Arbour county seat of Washtenaw County. There is a separation of Ann Arbour but still spelled 'our,' the normal spelling of arbor at that time. Noah Webster's modernization of it had not taken on yet.

"In any case they immediately started building. Some neighbors from Woodruff's Grove came to help. This kind of cooperation was typical in those days.

"We have a delightful letter from John Geddes, another name that's remembered in Ann Arbor, written in the summer of 1824.

"He said, 'We arrived in Ann Arbor before night. Ann Arbor then had one house, a sort of frame 1 1/2 story with no rafters and no roof on it. There was an additional walled block house and a tent north of the house. John Allen was putting up in the tent.

"Elisha Rumsey and his wife occupied the house and entertained persons coming viewing land as prospective farmers. These beginnings were on Huron Street by the creek eventually called Allen's Creek.

Photo by Susan Wineberg

**Russell Bidlack**

"Ezra Maynard also visited Ann Arbor in 1824. On June 5,1824 he wrote to his son in New York.

"He said the county seat was begun on March last by Messrs. Allen and Rumsey. Now there are about 100 lots taken, some houses commenced, mechanics of almost all kinds on the spot. Four hundred village lots were already staked out and many of them sold or given to mechanics.

"That was a trick of people establishing towns in the west—they would give away lots to persons with the kinds of professions or trades that would be desirable.

"The letter writers said mechanics were building frame houses. Two sawmills are commenced and a grist mill is to commence soon.

"There has been a great debate through the years, particularly in 1924 when the centennial of Ann Arbor was held as to how it got its name.

"Somehow the romantic story had arisen that Mrs. Rumsey and Mrs. Allen had sat under a wild grape arbor knitting or sewing and people then called it Ann's Arbor.

"It is true Mrs. Rumsey had the middle name Ann. I have not found any document where she was called Ann. She was called Mary Ann but the presence of Ann in her name probably helped convince Rumsey that Allen was right to call it Ann Arbor.

"Where did 'Arbor' come from? Some 170 odd years ago, arbor was typically used, particularly in the South, to describe what we would call an orchard with trees spaced far apart, a shady but very pleasant area.

"A number of people visiting Ann Arbor at this early date called the 'oak openings' an arbor. The trees were far apart. Perhaps the ground had been burned over regularly by the Indians, but, in any case, the great advantage was you could actually plow the land between these trees and enough sun would get in so you could raise a crop the first year which was most unusual for timbered areas of Michigan.

"Allen and Rumsey designated the east-west dividing line between their property Huron, Allen's tract on the north, Rumsey's on the south. They had 'Huron' on an 1825 map. I'm sure each one named his own streets.

"Three streets on Allen's side running parallel to Huron were Ann, Catherine and North. Three on Rumsey's side were called Washington, Liberty and William.

"In the summer of 1824, John Allen writes his parents about coming to Michigan.

"The letter is often referred to by relatives but no one has ever found it. However, Jane Trimble, his father's sister from Ohio is back on a visit to Augusta County in August 1824.

"Her letter back to one of her sons, John Trimble, who became a governor of Ohio, says her brother had been there the day before telling his parents what way to travel.

"Now this is August 20. On August 28 they set out with a covered wagon. In his letter Allen said Ann must come. The McCues were very concerned. They had serious doubts about John Allen. They had a long prayer meeting before they decided she should go.

"In any case, the Allens set out. The parents, Col. Allen, now 53, his wife, 49, were considered old. Two Allen children by John's first wife, were now 8 and 5. There were also Ann and her 17-month old daughter, John's younger brother, James Turner Allen, known as Turner, not quite 20, and a school teacher, Orville Barnes, a New Englander who had been teaching school in Virginia.

"The group was on the road almost two months. John Allen directed them to go to the Ohio River, then through Ohio. John waited for them in Detroit and they arrived in Ann Arbor on October 16.

"Col. Allen built a boat transporting immigrants as far as what is now Rawsonville on the Huron River from Detroit. The Erie Canal opened in 1825 and immigrants poured in.

"In July 1828, Col. James Allen died. John's mother lived another 33 years. After Col. Allen died she went for a visit back to Virginia and stayed five years. She took Allen's two children by his first marriage with her.

"There's a rather pathetic letter from the son, James C. Allen, begging his father to let him come home at the end of five years.

"John Allen wasn't content with his original purchase. He kept buying more and more land. He was successful in selling lots, much of them on time. There was all sorts of credit in those days and the time came in the 1830s when he really became a very rich man, on paper at least.

"As John's prosperity increased, Ann lived increasingly comfortably. He built a new house in 1828. In letters of a later date she refers to having servants though there came a time when she had to do without them.

"In 1836 John Allen decided that his wealth in Michigan land, which amounted to thousands and thousands of acres, was sufficient that he should open an office on Wall Street in New York City to sell western land.

"He and Ann and their daughter went in style. We have marvelous letters from Ann and Sarah describing their journey, some by train, some by carriage drawn by four white horses,

driven by a groom.

"When he got there he bought a house for $16,000, a massive amount of money in 1836. He hired a special tutor for his daughter, Sarah. Ann lived in some luxury and, for the first time, was able to visit her two sons back in Virginia.

"Ann Allen was always referred to in Ann Arbor as being melancholy. She had something to be melancholy about, having left those two sons in Virginia.

"Happily, as they grew older, she corresponded with them and one son, Tom, saved her letters. A great-granddaughter recently sent those letters to me and I placed them in Bentley Library.

"They are, of course, fascinating for the later period of Ann's life here in Michigan.

"However, when Ann was visiting her relatives in Virginia in early 1837, something happened to the economy and in the end John lost absolutely everything.

"He wrote to Gov. Woodbridge of Michigan in 1838 saying he could not raise $10. Ann had to borrow money to return to New York and accompany him back to Michigan.

"Not only had he lost his own money, he had lost money from many other people and once again there were bitter creditors.

"In Ann's letters back to Thomas, a most unhappy woman is talking about how she is so very poor and no one to help and it is very lonely among her Yankee neighbors. She did not like Yankees.

"In 1844 when her son, Thomas, was now old enough, he came and got her and they went back to Virginia. She lived the rest of her life, until 1878, in Virginia.

"After Ann Allen returned to Virginia, John did all sorts of things trying to again become wealthy. He joined a church for the first time in his life, not Presbyterian but one founded by Emanuel Swedenborg, a most controversial church then and even today, I believe.

"John became very involved in the church, the anti-Masonic movement and in politics. He was elected to the Michigan State Senate and, in 1848, he actually considered running for Governor on the Democratic ticket.

"However, an event occurred in 1849 he could not resist responding to, the discovery of gold in California. He went in January 1850 so he just missed being a '49er.

"I'm sure the neighbors in Ann Arbor were not greatly surprised when John Allen, at age 53, started out for California. He was a venturesome man. Any time he thought he could make money he was interested.

"He went by way of the isthmus which was the fastest route but also the most expensive as opposed to going around by the cape or across land.

"He got there. He wrote wonderful letters to his old mother still living in Ann Arbor and they were published in the local paper. We know from the letters he hadn't any luck at all in finding gold but he concluded the possibilities for wealth were in supplying the needs of miners.

"He bought a 40 acre farm and began raising livestock, chickens and such along with grain. In the last letter we know about, he wrote that in two years we'll be rolling in money. In the same letter he mentioned he was not feeling very well.

"Shortly thereafter it was reported back in Ann Arbor that John Allen had died. He was buried at a spot now occupied by the San Francisco City Hall.

"The doctor's report on his death survives. We know he died of a complaint of the liver although you could never trust doctors' reports on death being exact in those days or even today.

"Allen's obituary appeared April 30,1851 in the *Michigan Argus*.

"It read: Died—in San Francisco, on the 11th of March last, after a protracted and painful illness, Hon. John Allen, in the 56th (55th) year of his age. The deceased was the first proprietor of the land upon which our flourishing city is now built, and may therefore be regarded as the pioneer of our city, and one of the first settlers of the county. He was twice elected to a seat in the Senate of the state, and witnessed this beautiful Peninsula when only the home of the red man of the forest, and saw it teeming with the busy hum of civilization, and occupied by a population of nearly 400,000. Yet, after all, it was his lot to die among strangers. He was a man talented, and has left a numerous circle of friends to lament his loss."

## BE A FAN OF THE MUSEUM

By the end of August, a novel fund raising solicitation was to be sent to museum donors featuring a hand fan.

The fan, handy on a hot late summer day, will be imprinted, "I'm a Fan of the Museum on Main Street" and have a sketch of the Museum house on the back.

Karen O'Neal and Pam Newhouse were the key planners of the fanathon.

## MoMS ON STATE REGISTER

President Susan Wineberg reported at the annual meeting that our Museum on Main Street has been added to the State Register of Historic Places. It was put on the National Register in 1994.

## AROUND THE COUNTY

**Salem Historical Society:** Annual square dance, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, September 28, at Moore-Moon Barn, 518281 Eight Mile Road. Public welcome.

**Saline Society:** 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Depot Museum. September 18 program on barn preservation by Ted Micka. Museum also open Saturdays 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

**Webster Society:** Annual Fall Festival, Saturday, September 28 all day, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. featuring pig roast dinner, hay rides, petting zoo, country store, crafts, restored blacksmith shop and one-room school. It all takes place at the corner of Webster Church and Farrell Roads.

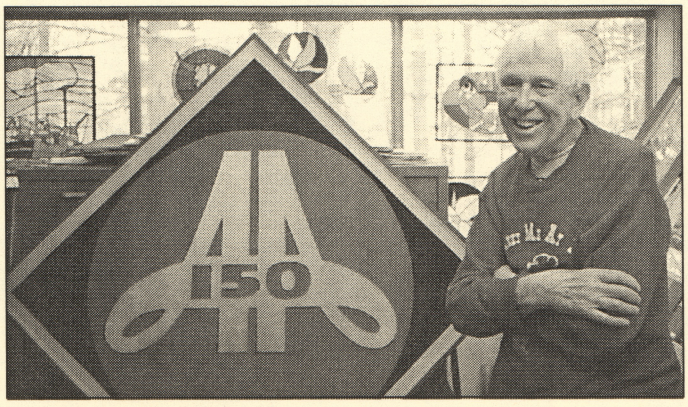
**Ypsilanti Society:** Museum, 220 N. Huron, open 2-4 p.m. Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Archives open 9 a.m.-noon Monday-Friday.

## FUND RAISING COMMITTEE AT WORK THIS SUMMER

The WCHS Fund Raising Committee, chaired by Caroline Mohai, has been hard at work this summer on several projects:

- A fall fund raiser is planned November 9 at the Gandy Dancer.
- They parked cars at the Museum on Main Street during Art Fair.
- A special fanathon mailing was to be sent to donors in late August.
- They are seeking partial sponsorship of *The Impressions* by local businesses.
- They are working on a new brochure about the Society and Museum.

Committee members are Patricia Austin, Patricia Creal, Toni McCann, Pam Newhouse, Karen O'Neal, Mark St. John, Karen Simpson, Pauline Walters, and Susan Wineberg.




**Milt Kemnitz, good friend of the Historical Society, has donated his original painting of Ann Arbor's sesquicentennial logo. Milt designed and painted it for the celebration in 1974. It was originally displayed in the city's Sesquicentennial Headquarters.**

BUS TOUR VISITS

# MAUMEE RIVER VALLEY—CORRIDOR OF HISTORY

Thanks to spark plugs and concerned citizens the Toledo area gained its most popular Metropark 22 years ago, Wildwood Preserve.

The park contains 460 acres with a stream running through it, lots of hills, unusual for this generally flat part of the country, and the magnificent, restored Georgian-style house built in 1938 by the Stranahan family.

The park was the first stop on the annual WCHS bus tour. There our guide, Ted Ligibel, an Eastern Michigan University professor of historic preservation and an Ohio resident, joined us for the morning.

"The park very likely would have become a posh subdivision like the one across the street had not citizens, [including our guide], worked to save it 22 years ago."

"Robert Stranahan and his brother, Frank, came from the East Coast and started Champion Spark Plug Company, still one of the largest producers of spark plugs. There is also a company called AC Spark Plug.

"Originally the Stranahan brothers and a guy named Albert Champion were together. They had a big falling out and parted but the Stranahans kept the Champion name. Champion formed his own company which became AC Spark Plug.

"The Stranahans were feeding the auto industry and making tons of money. They both moved to big estates, one down on the river near Perrysburg, the other here. Robert Stranahan, Sr., started building this in the 1920s.

"The house is a relatively authentic reproduction of 18th century Georgian style. The estate had a horse farm. They had their own stables and a riding arena, since torn down, their own pool and a limousine garage.

"After both Mr. and Mrs. Stranahan died the property went up for sale. It was appraised at $4.3 million.

"The Metropark system, established in the 1920s, went after a tax levy to buy this place. For about eight months we were in this intensive campaign to save the estate. The Wildwood name came later.

"Lo and behold, by a fairly good margin, not huge, the citizens of the county voted to tax themselves to give the parks board the money to buy this.

"To get the money up front the Nature Conservancy temporarily bought the land. Then the parks paid them back as they took in the money from the levy over 20 years.

"It has developed into the most popular of nine Metroparks and on some days, particularly holidays, it has to close because its full."

He walked the group back to the original driveway. "The 'limo' garage was built in the 1930s when the estate fully opened. Originally there were four car entries, now there are two. The rest is now Metroparks Hall. It has an art gallery in it. At Christmastime it has a gift shop and when there are events, it is open for refreshments."

"My grandfather had an import store downtown. Mrs. Stranahan would call and say I need my Brie cheese. I would deliver it. It was a great thrill to see the estate.

"The Stranahan family that survives wasn't in favor of the park. They thought development best but they got their money and in the end didn't care. The son who just passed away had an adjacent estate on Corey Road.

**Battle of Fallen Timbers Monument. Figures are an Indian, General Wayne and a militiaman.**

"This was originally, of course, all Indian territory, in historical times primarily Ottawa Indians. So there are a lot of things called Ottawa—Ottawa Hills, Ottawa River, Ottawa Overlook.

"Standard European farmsteaders followed. About a half mile away is an old farmstead from the mid-1800s still standing and another from the 1830s across the way.

"In the early part of the 20th century Toledo was a big industrial town. It was the third largest rail center in the U.S. It had all kinds of glass manufacturing—Libby and Owens Illinois, Libby-Owens-Ford, Owens-Corning. There were a lot of auto parts manufactured.

"There was a huge industrial upsurge, beginning in the 1880s. By 1910 or '20 some of the people who started these companies had so much money they don't know what to do with it.

"One of the great things they usually did was build a big house and buy a bunch of land."

### THE QUEEN'S SUBJECTS

"Had it not been for the Battles of Fallen Timbers, Fort Meigs and Lake Erie, we'd all have been subjects of the Queen."

He called attention to a little undulation ahead and a mass of oak trees.

"That is part of the old glacial ecology. Here we call it the oak openings. You have a little of it up in your area. Underneath a lot of this land are sandy beaches from old glacial lakes over clay."

Along the walkway were boards with a sunburst design that told the history of the estate.

"The house has a lot of details of early period colonial homes. With the two story porch across the front it has sort of a southern feeling. The doorway is especially nice with a beautiful elliptical fan window above it. It is classical Georgian-style coming from the Adams Brothers and England.

"Except for Metropark offices in the servants quarters, the house is a house museum. A volunteer group has helped furnish it and give guided tours. Unfortunately for us, it doesn't open until noon.

"The dining room has hand painted French wall paper," Prof. Ligibel said. "The kitchen pantry is so big it has a two-story library ladder that you can roll from one side of the room to the other to get at top doors and drawers."

The former stables are now the visitor's center.

The next stop was the Fallen Timbers historic site along the Maumee River.

"The original Maumee River flowed in the opposite direction. There was a glacier about a mile high here. The climate had gotten a few degrees colder, causing more ice to form. The glaciers got down as far as Cincinnati.

"If you ever go to Cincinnati you'll see its very hilly—that's all of northwest Ohio and southern Michigan dumped in southern Ohio. The Ohio River was formed on the southern boundary of that glacier.

"With the Maumee River, the glacier was sitting so it couldn't flow northeast as now, so it flowed the other way to the Ft. Wayne area and became the Wabash River that flows down through Indiana, sort of on a diagonal, to the Ohio River and then that goes into the Mississippi at Cairo, Illinois.

"About 10,000 to 12,000 years ago the glacier melted back and receded up into Michigan, then the water reversed itself because of the natural lay of the land.

"Streams usually come into a river at an angle in the direction of the flow. On the Maumee they come in at opposite angles.

"The Maumee technically starts at Ft. Wayne in northwest Indiana with the coming together of the St. Joseph and St. Mary's Rivers and flows into Lake Erie and eventually into the Atlantic Ocean through the St. Lawrence Seaway.

"You need to think of the Maumee as a Native American superhighway. You could get from the Atlantic through Lakes Ontario and Erie, up the Maumee to Ft. Wayne. It was then only a three to four mile portage to the Wabash flowing into the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico or up to Minnesota and Canada.

"They were still using this valley when the French came in the 1600s. It was heavily populated and there was farming lots of places.

"The French co-existed relatively peacefully with the Indians. The French mostly wanted beaver—there was a craze for beaver in Europe.

"Enter the English. They essentially supplant the French in 1763, especially around Detroit. The English and French go to war. The French lose. and the British take over. Then the British and Americans go to war. This is really where the Revolutionary War ended.

"They were battling each other right up through the War of 1812 for control of this valley. It was strategic because of that 'superhighway' situation. One of those battles was the Battle of Fallen Timbers.

"That was the battle where President Washington hired one of his top military commanders from the Revolutionary War, General Anthony Wayne, to come out and settle this Indian and British problem once and for all."

He pointed out the recently re-discovered 200 acre site of the main battle in a bean field and woods. Through archeological investigations and using metal detectors they found lots of bullets, uniform buttons and bayonets.

"We know, based on first-hand accounts that were uncovered, that this is the site. The complication is that it is owned by the City of Toledo for economic development.

"We are currently negotiating with the city. They want $2.5 million at the very least. The National Park Service met with us here. They are interested in designating this as a national park.

"At the time of the battle—August 20,1794—the area was completely wild, much of it heavily forested. There were some Indian villages on the flood plain. The battle takes place in the thick of the woods.

"The reason they call it Fallen Timbers is because a tornado had gone through several years before and knocked down a bunch of trees.

"It apparently was very hot. You can imagine these guys, dressed in multiple layers of wool, chasing each other through the woods.

"It was quite a stunning victory for Anthony Wayne. He chased the Indians several miles down to the British fort called Fort Miamis. The Indians were not let in by their supposed allies.

"The Indians dispersed and went back to their villages or up to Detroit. That was the end of what they call the Indian wars.

"The bus stopped at the state memorial to Fallen Timbers long enough for tourgoers to walk back to see the monument put up in the 1920s that overlooks the Maumee River.

"The memorial site was part of the battle site but not where the main battle was fought.

"It was a humid day. The commander at the British fort could hear the gun shots. It apparently lasted about two hours. The casualties were not too great but they were left on the field.

"Wayne came back three days later and buried those they could find but, remember, they were scattered in the woods.

"The collections of buttons we find we think are where people died and were never found.

"Wayne marched down to the British fort and had words with the British commander. Both said they won. Wayne marched back through the valley and destroyed the Indians crops. They starved in the winter.

"In the winter, Wayne marched to Ft. Wayne where the largest Miami Indian village was, the home of Chief Little Turtle. Wayne destroyed the deserted village and built his fort right on top of it.

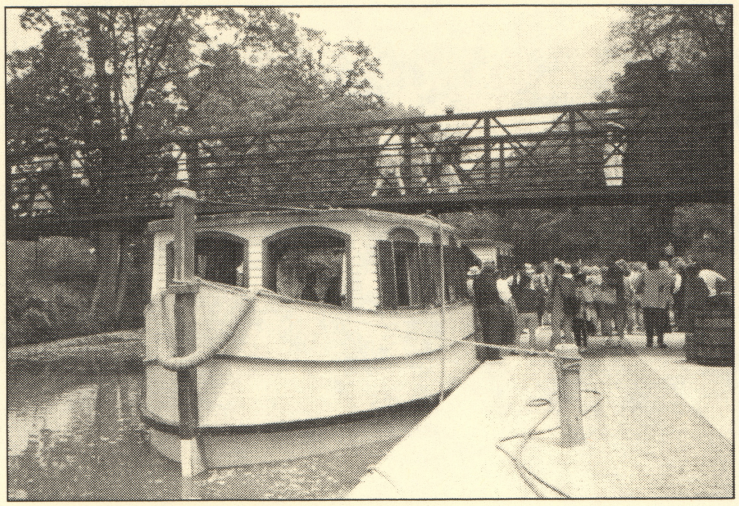
"In 1812, the British tried to reclaim the Maumee Valley. They were defeated at the Battle of Fort Meigs by General William Henry Harrison. The British were pushed up into Ontario. Tecumseh was killed at the Battle of the Thames there.

"Had it not been for Fallen Timbers, Fort Meigs and the Battle of Lake Erie we'd all be subjects of the Queen today.

"I am president of a group, the Maumee Valley Heritage Corridor, that is trying to get National Park Service designation for the whole corridor. The land between Ft. Wayne and Toledo is really interesting, geologically, culturally and naturally. We think we have a pretty good shot at it but its going to take time.

"The current Congress has not decided whether they are for this or not so we are sort of stuck in a holding pattern.

"In the meantime, we are going after national park designation for Fallen Timbers, as well as Fort Meigs across the river in Perrysburg and Fort Miamis, the British fort. The park service, right up to the director has been very interested.



**Canal boat replica gives rides on a restored one-mile section of the Miami-Erie Canal. Towed by a mule, the speed is four miles an hour max.**

"We are also going for designation as National Scenic By-way for U.S. 24 here where its route is the same as the old Miami-Erie Canal. They filled in and built the highway on top."

The bus drove slowly through the older part of Waterville, established in 1818 along the river. A lot of these towns were settled right after the War of 1812. He pointed out buildings from the 1820s and '30s including the Columbian House Inn, now a restaurant.

"When the Historic American Buildings Survey was done in the 1930s the Columbian House was the only building in the Maumee Valley that they drew measured drawings of to deposit in the Library of Congress."

The bus paused by the picturesque remains of a multi-arch inter-urban highway bridge by a giant rock called Roche de Bout by the French.

"In early accounts of the valley, when there were no names yet, they talk about the rapids or head of the rapids which is Grand Rapids where you are going for lunch, or the foot of the rapids near Maumee and Perrysburg or here at this rock, a prominent meeting area for Native Americans.

"We know that the night before the battle the chiefs met here to decide whether to go into battle. Little Turtle wanted to make peace but he bowed to Blue Jacket and the other chiefs who didn't.

### CHIEF'S STAMPING GROUND

"Chiefs Pontiac, Tecumseh, Little Turtle, Blue Jacket—all those names that are almost immortal in American history—the Maumee Valley was their stamping ground."

"General Wayne's Fort Deposit is somewhere across the way because there are accounts that the Indians could see Wayne's troops.

"When the bridge was built in 1907-08 it was considered the second largest bridge of its kind in the world.

"It's too dangerous to get out on it anymore and no one will admit to owning it because no one wants to pay the bill to tear it down.

"One of the earliest preservation battles in the valley was to save that rock when they built the bridge. The bridge company said they would never touch the rock. Then in the middle of the night they blew off the end of it and started construction. A bridge abutment is on the rock.

"There was even a preservation movement in the valley in 1840 when three Irish bachelor brothers bought Fort Meigs in Perrysburg to save it from development.

"While passing Farnsworth Park, he noted that one can walk from Farnsworth Metropark to Grand Rapids on the old tow path of the canal, about 15 miles. He pointed out an 1840s farmhouse built by John Isham, superintendent of the canal system.

"Its difficult to dig anywhere in this valley and not find some Indian artifacts. Fort Wayne is considered by some to have been one of the largest Indian settlements in North America."

The bus passed Missionary Island, the village of Chief Pontiac's mother where he retreated in 1763 after his defeat at Detroit. He was born near Defiance.

"I believe Blue Jacket, a white man, was captured in southern Ohio as a boy. Later he was reunited with one of his brothers but chose to remain an Indian."

Prof. Ligibel pointed out the Bluebird Special excursion train that runs between Grand Rapids and Waterville in the summer.

The bus passed a farmhouse which once was the home of a relative of President Rutherford B. Hayes and an Irish cemetery. The canal was built by Irish immigrants who came in the 1840s as a result of the Irish potato famine."

In Providence Metropark, westernmost of the nine Metroparks, a one mile section of the Miami-Erie Canal has been re-dug and reopened. One can now ride on it in a replica of a canal boat. All tourgoers who wished took a ride on it after lunch.

"Grand Rapids is a wonderful pre-Civil War canal town of 900-and-some people. A side canal runs from the main canal behind the commercial buildings.

"Grand Rapids seems to have one outstanding example of each style of architecture. This Queen Anne-style house, was built about 1885, by one of the pioneer grain merchants and dry goods proprietors in the town, B.F. Kerr, and stayed in the family until about 15 years ago when a woman from Perrysburg bought it.

"Her dream was to have a health retreat. Believe it or not this is now an internationally recognized health spa.

"The first and second floors were restored to what they would have been originally, including much original furniture. The lower floor is where the saunas, whirlpools and manicures are and the third floor is now the yoga room.

"Tom Monaghan comes quite a bit and he takes the proprietor to his summer home on Drummond Island. Jessica Savitch was here before she passed away. Other famous people come here because its so out of the way.

Photo by Susan Wineberg

**This group toured the Maumee River from Toledo to Grand Rapids, Ohio.**

He pointed out two spectacular Greek Revival "temples in the wilderness" from the 1840s. They are still in the original families.

A buffet luncheon was served at the LaRoe Restaurant and Tavern in a restored Victorian building in downtown Grand Rapids.

After lunch tourgoers had their choice of a leisurely canal boat ride, visiting nearby antique shops or seeing Isaac Ludwig's restored sawmill.

Back aboard the bus, Ina Hanel, WCHS vice-president who arranged the tour, took over guide duties after Prof. Ligibel left for another engagement.

"The town of Providence started up the same time as Grand Rapids but on the other side of the river. After two cholera epidemics and a fire the town died in the 1850s. Two buildings remain . One, a cabin, was moved. We will go by it later," she said.

"In the 1830s and '40s there were so many saloons in the town there was quite a drinking problem. The women decided it was getting out of hand. Several times they dressed in pants, and armed with axes, raided the bars and chased the men out but the very next night the bars were back in operation."

Ina pointed out a couple of one-room schoolhouses. One had two front doors, one for boys, the other for girls. The second school had a slate shingle roof.

After deep ditches were dug to drain the flat land of the Black Swamp area, the farmers had very fertile farms, she noted. The fields are planted right up to the road to maximize land use for farming.

"Similar to Michigan, the roads run very straight in cardinal directions, either north-south or east-west. That is because of the 1785 land ordinance for the Northwest Territory. When they surveyed the land they forgot to put in room for roads so roads tend to show up on section lines and township boundaries."

## ARTIFACTS TO DONATE?

Anyone wishing to donate an artifact to WCHS should contact Judy Chrisman, collections chair, at 769-7859 or by mail, 1809 Dexter Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

## SEEKING SPONSORSHIP

President Susan Wineberg is heading an effort to get business sponsorship for *The Impressions.*

Each issue costs approximately $750 to print and mail. She is appealing for partial sponsorship in return for promotion as the issue's sponsor. If you know of an interested sponsor please call Susan at 668-747.

## 1996-97 OFFICERS, DIRECTORS LISTED

President Susan Wineberg and the other WCHS officers agreed to serve and were reelected for 1996-97 at the annual meeting May 15.

They are: Ina Hanel, vice-president; Judy Chrisman, recording secretary; Caroline Mohai, corresponding secretary with Pauline Walters, assistant; Patricia Creal, treasurer, and Alice Ziegler, editor of *The Impressions.* Patricia Austin is immediate past-president.

Four directors whose terms expired were reelected to three-year terms. They are Arthur French, Nancy McKinney, Karen O'Neal and Peter Rocco.

Olive (Bets) Hansen resigned in June and Kerrington Adams was appointed to complete her term expiring in 1998.

Other elected board members continuing to serve are Lucille Fisher, Jay Snyder, Toni McCann, Rosemarion Blake, Arlene Schmid and Esther Warzynski.

The president also may appoint directors-at-large to two-year terms. Eunice Dobbs, Peggy Haines and Ginny Hills agreed to serve another term. Elizabeth Dusseau and Dean Smith retired on the board and were awarded certificates of thanks for their service. Pam Newhouse and Karen Simpson continue in terms expiring next year.

## HOW TO JOIN

Send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to WCHS Membership, c/o Patty Creal, Treasurer, P.O. Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336. Annual dues are individual, $15; couple/family, $25; student or senior (60+), $10; senior couple (one 60+),$19; business/association, $50; patron, $100. formation: 662-9092.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WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**"ART-CASE PIANOS"**
**2 p.m. Sunday**
**September 22,1996**

Gold Room
Martha Cook Building
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Ann Arbor, Michigan

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